

CA20N AF
-76575

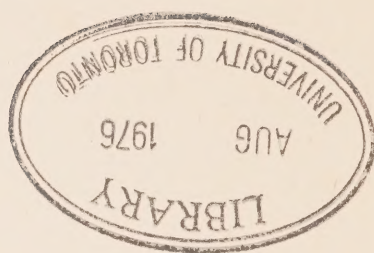
A Statement by
the Ministry of
Agriculture and Food

The Honourable
William G. Newman
Minister

March 1976

R. G. Bennett
Deputy Minister

A Strategy for Ontario Farmland



Ministry of Agriculture and Food

A STRATEGY FOR ONTARIO FARMLAND

A STATEMENT
BY THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
WITH RESPECT TO
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND LAND USE IN ONTARIO

MARCH, 1976



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
University of Toronto

<https://archive.org/details/31761114691181>

BACKGROUND

Food and agriculture are currently in the spotlight. Concerns are expressed both in provincial and in world-wide terms. On the global scale, the concern is for the provision of enough food for growing world populations. At the provincial level, the concern is for the retention of an agricultural industry able to accommodate future needs.

The preservation of the fine agricultural land with which the province is blessed is one of the most pressing issues in the Province of Ontario. Ontario has a population nearing 8 million and it is expected that this will expand to about 12 million by the year 2000. Many people have been concerned that rapid population expansion will lead to the urbanization of large areas in the countryside and eventually to a shortage of good agricultural land available for Ontario farmers. They have pointed with alarm to the tremendous growth of the urban area around Toronto, in the Golden Horseshoe around the end of Lake Ontario, and in the Niagara Peninsula.

The Government is taking steps to ensure that an abundance of land and food is available not just in the year 2000, but for centuries after that. It is the goal of this government to maintain a permanent, secure and economically viable agricultural industry for Ontario, not only as a producer of food, but as an important component of our economic base, a source of employment, and as the basis of the rural community and the rural way of life.

The resource that truly counts, in agriculture, is not the land, nor the capital, but the people. In many parts of the world there are entire families living on the produce of a single acre. In Ontario, some very large and profitable poultry, hog, beef, fruit and vegetable operations thrive on a small acreage, because of the ingenuity and hard work of the owners. It is very important to distinguish between the productivity of land and the productivity of people. There will be land enough in this province to feed much more than the population we have now.

To accomplish this the Government will proceed with two broad initiatives; measures to ensure that within any area the better land is kept for agricultural purposes, and programs to ensure the economic feasibility of using the best land for agricultural production. The Food Land Development Branch has been set up within the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to work with local government in planning for ongoing agriculture, to monitor the use of foodland, to comment on new plans and projects, and to develop policy recommendations for the preservation of agricultural land.

Ontario has about 20 million acres of Class 1,2,3 and 4 land suited to agriculture as classified by the Canada Land Inventory. This is just over 31,000 square miles. In addition, we have another 12 million acres of lower class land and excellent organic soils. Because of a favoured climate, these lands are especially important when considering the agricultural land in Canada.

We now have about 8 million people in Ontario. Over the next 25 years, we will gain another 4 million for a total population in the year 2000 of about 12 million. At a density of 20 persons per acre, for example, we will need about 310 square miles of space for the additional people.

Allowing for expansion of infrastructure such as hydro lines and highways, and of industrial and commercial land use, we get a total of 400 to 580 square miles, or 256,000 to 370,000 acres, of total land needed to house and serve all the additional population of Ontario to the year 2000.

If all of this were to take place on Ontario farmland, it would take less than two and a half percent of that land out of production. Through a variety of policies we intend to ensure that much of that growth takes place on land which is already within urban boundaries, or on lower class lands which are not suitable for food production.

There have been remarkable changes in the use of land for agriculture. When Ontario was first settled, vast acreages of land were cleared for farming, much of which was unsuited to ongoing agriculture. Most of those farms were only 100 acres in size, and by the time their owners had a family of grown sons, they either bought out their neighbours or migrated to Western Canada. The number of farmers and the acreage they farmed, were at their peak at 1911, and both have fallen ever since. There has been a turn around in acreages in cropland in Ontario since 1971, when higher prices encouraged Ontario's food producers to expand both acreage and production.

During this period of consolidation of farm numbers and farm acreages, production has increased steadily in agriculture. Whereas 30 years ago each farmer produced enough to feed himself and 12 other people, today, each farmer in Ontario produces enough to feed himself and up to 50 other people. Not only have Ontario farmers intensified their activities, they have also broadened their scope. They have been receptive to new techniques,

including mechanization, use of chemicals and cropping practices, and to new commodities including new varieties and new crops. From 1951 to 1971, production per acre doubled on Ontario farms. The market only demanded a 65 percent increase in output, so the acreage employed in farming was reduced. Farmers concentrated their production on the best land and dropped lower quality land from their farm plans. Agriculture of all the economic sectors in Canada is the only one that has shown an increase through the 1970's in its percentage share of national productivity.

It has been implied that 26 acres of farmland per hour have been permanently lost to agriculture -- paved over with concrete or lost to housing. This is not true: If one considers every patch of land from which \$50 worth of produce was sold in 1966 and compares the total acreage with all farms from which \$50 of produce was sold in 1971, then a substantial amount of land has been retired from production. If one takes the difference in acres of improved farmland between 1966 and 1971 and divides by the number of hours in five years, the 26-acre per hour figure emerges. But much of the land will return to agriculture if and when prices justify cultivation. It is in reserve, resting in woodlot, recreational or other undefined use. The period 1966 to 1971 was, after all, a period of very low farm income. Some of that land has come back into full-time farm production since 1971. An estimated 6.6 acres per hour of principle field crops have come back into production and much more of it can be returned to crop production when it is required.

This trend can be illustrated in many ways, but perhaps the best is to look at the areas of Ontario which lost the most farmland during the 1966 to 1971 period. Improved foodland acreage in Southwestern Ontario --

Essex, Kent, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex, Huron, Perth, Oxford, Waterloo and Haldimand -- fell by only 3 percent during the period. In the North, the Parry Sound area for example, losses were 21 percent, as farmers stopped cultivating small fields and shallow soils and in some cases, allowed the land to be converted to recreational use. But this was essentially uneconomical for modern agriculture because it was shallow or in fields too small to cultivate.

But the central problem is the loss of Class 1,2,3 and 4 farmland close to the cities. Our concern is with the priceless lands of the Toronto-Niagara Golden Horse-shoe and other fine farmlands taken up by urban expansion. In these areas, 13.7 percent of the land in farmland in 1966 was not in production in 1971.

The economics of Ontario agriculture determine whether farmers expand their acreage or not. When prices are low, farmers consolidate. They use the acres they have, they do not expand output, they invest less in new equipment, seed and fertilizer. They let their poorer land go out of cultivation, to rest in pasture or woodlot. Sometimes they try to sever a lot or two for retirement.

When prices are satisfactory, farmers expand their acreage and use every acre more intensively. They invest more in equipment, fertilizer and better seed. They buy or rent more land. They clear scrub and fence rows to reclaim land, they drain land as rapidly as equipment becomes available. Their output rises rapidly until market prices fall to signal the need to end expansion and to begin a new period of consolidation. This is the normal farm cycle. From 1966 to 1971, low prices signalled that production of most products was too high. Ontario

farmers reduced their acres of field crops by 6.3 percent and their total improved farmland by 9.5 percent. This was the period when 26 acres per hour of improved farmland was withdrawn from cultivation. From 1971 to 1974, prices were higher, and Ontario farmers increased field crop acreage by almost 3 percent. Expanded to include all cropland, this represents an increase in total cropland of about 7.0 acres per hour between 1971 and 1974. Total improved farmland has decreased by about half of one per cent.

In looking at changing agricultural land use, the location of land in relation to major urban areas is an important consideration. The future for agriculture has quite different prospects in areas immediately adjacent to major urban areas, and in the next layer out. The concern is both with lands immediately adjacent to cities, lands which are already in small parcels and incompatible uses, and with lands in the next layer out from the cities, lands which are subject to pressures for rural residences, hobby farms, recreation and other non-farm uses. Steps are being taken now to ensure that these lands are not lost permanently to future, ongoing agriculture.

Investigations have shown that much of this land is not in urban use. It is true that some of it is severed into small parcels, and some of it is under pavement, but the majority of it is recoverable. It remains in large parcels, often used as a rural retreat. The rural land owner from the city is in a curious position. He does not compete with the business farmer and he does not bespoil the land. In many cases these land owners perform the useful function of keeping foodland available for future use when our requirements for food production will have increased. To have all of this land in production now could create a flood of farm production that

would depress prices. The Government believes that land use planning and land taxation policies can provide for the maintenance of such holdings, and the orderly transition of these lands into agriculture as our food needs increase. Over the coming months additional policies will be defined in this area.

In order to understand the economics of agriculture, the Government of Ontario launched a major investigation of farm income problems in 1965, assisted by a Special Committee on Farm Incomes. That Committee brought in its report in 1968 and many of the recommendations were translated into policy during 1968, 1969, and 1970. The Capital Grants program provided capital for silos, land drainage, new farm buildings, and field enlargement. Those grants, together with other loans for drainage and farm expansion amounted to almost \$200 million. This infusion of money helped Ontario farmers to virtually double their output per acre.

During these years changing patterns of food production brought about an increase in overall output. In the past 30 years, Ontario farmers have substantially increased the output of livestock feeds. Although the acreage of feed grains increased by 6.8 percent, total production increased by 126 percent from an average of 2.3 million tons in the 1941 to 1945 period to 5.2 million tons during 1971 to 1975. The acreages of the higher yielding and higher nutrient crops, barley and grain corn, have increased substantially while for lower nutrient crops such as oats and mixed grain, acreages have declined.

In forage production, corn silage acreage and yields have increased while the acreage of hay has declined resulting in an overall increase of 25 percent in the production of harvested forages.

There has been a slight increase in the numbers of livestock in Ontario. Roughage consuming animal units increased from 2.1 million in 1951 to 2.4 million in 1971, while grain consuming animal units increased from 390 thousand to over 622 thousand. Although there was a significant decline in the number of dairy cows (18 per-cent), total milk production increased from 5 billion pounds in 1951 to 6.2 billion in 1971. The number of beef cows more than doubled during the period to reach 435 thousand head in 1971, while the number of steers nearly tripled to 630 thousand head. Since 1971, there has been a small decrease in the number of dairy cows but beef cows and steers have increased slightly. The number of swine and poultry on Ontario farms have increased substantially. For instance, the number of swine under 6 months averaged 1.4 million in 1951 compared with 1.9 million in 1971, while the number of hens and pullets kept for laying purposes increased from 6.8 to 10.9 million.

This is only the beginning for Ontario agriculture. In looking at the future of Ontario agriculture there are a number of factors which provide the potential for future expansion in output. Favoured by climate, southern Ontario is unique in Canada. It has the capability to produce over 100 crops, compared to most parts of Canada where a much narrower range of crops can be grown because of limitations on heat, moisture, or frost-free days. Drainage on an estimated four million acres of heavy, wet soils offers the potential to shift these lands from their current crops of pasture and hay to higher value crops such as corn with a possible doubling in output per acre. The 11 million acres in the greater and lesser clay belts, although predominantly class 4 soils, could, with drainage and fertilizer, provide a certain range of crops when prices rise sufficiently to make these improvements worthwhile. New discoveries in agricultural technology, the main reason

for our recent increases in productivity, will provide for future increases as new varieties and new techniques are proven out and put into practice. Despite these prospects for the future, the base from which we must now operate dictates that we can produce food most economically on the lands with the higher capability.

CONTAINMENT OF THE GROWTH OF URBAN AREAS ONTO RURAL LAND

This government is committed to preserve the better agricultural land in all parts of Ontario. This policy must be equitable to farmers and consumers; to urban developers and house buyers. It must assure for future generations an adequate supply of both foodlands and food.

We believe that the marketplace should be left to operate as much as possible. The amount of land used for urban growth should be constrained by zoning. This should encourage every urban community to fill in available space before expanding. The policy will require a community to study all available choices for expansion. The policy will not be a straight jacket.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food, through the Food Land Development Branch, is working within the context of the Planning Act to protect the interests of agriculture. In consultation with other Ministries, the Food Land Development Branch reviews plans and projects which threaten to intrude on agricultural land. The Branch is charged with developing foodland guidelines for developing plans for urban growth and interim agricultural use in fringe areas, for developing policies to divert pressures

for rural residential and industrial areas away from foodlands and into more suitable areas. The goal is to strengthen the control which local municipalities can exercise over their valuable foodlands through a comprehensive set of guidelines, policies and programs without taking from them the right to make local decisions.

The Niagara Regional Plan provides an example of this procedure. The Regional Municipality of Niagara has prepared a plan. The Government has asked for a review of urban boundaries on the fruit lands and other high capability agricultural land. The Region is now examining opportunities to tighten the boundaries of its urban areas and redirect growth in the region away from the better agricultural land to the poorer land in the south of the region. Their work indicates there is considerable opportunity to modify current growth trends and preserve agricultural land in the region.

The Government proposal is for policies which, taken together, should reserve foodlands for food production, should provide farmers with a reasonable assurance of a stable environment in which to operate and a stable income from year to year, and should leave as much freedom as possible in the hands of local people, working through their municipal structures.

The elements in the policy are:

1. Agriculture is an important component in the provincial development strategy. The policy objectives of that strategy -- regional economic and social development, reduce disparities, protect natural resources, and plan growth and urban development, all reinforce a permanent, secure, and economically viable agricultural industry for Ontario.

The cornerstone of this policy will be local planning and control. Municipalities have increasingly been looking at problems of accommodating growth and protecting agriculture. Huron County, for example, has prepared a bench mark plan delineating the county resources for a full range of land uses, examining local preferences for the amount and type of each activity, and designating future areas within which various types of land use would dominate. This example and others belie the notion that planning should be conducted and enforced at the provincial level. The provincial government will, however, provide guidelines and work with municipalities as they define areas for ongoing agriculture and develop policies to maintain an agricultural presence.

2. The second major policy concerns provincial agricultural development strategy, and provides for:

A. A provincial commodity income stabilization program, providing farmers with a contributory income assurance plan covering major commodities. The government will have much more to say about this vital new program during the next few months.

B. Provincial production expansion program will be continued, not involving quotas or limits on production, but providing production incentives as additional output of food is required. Grants and low cost loans to farmers from 1968 to the present have been an important mechanism for encouraging the adoption of new technology and crop varieties. The carefully regulated flow of these grants is a good technique for balancing agricultural production with market conditions. Thus, the additional potential of Ontario's agricultural land can be brought into full production as soon as the investment is justified by the North American and world markets for food.

C. Continued development and expansion will take place in the food producer training programs at the Colleges of Agricultural Technology and at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph. As new techniques become available, the government will ensure that these are passed on to practicing farmers through special education programs. These programs ensure that sufficient numbers of trained farmers are available to provide Ontario's food and to take full advantage of the free enterprise rural environment we are creating for the future.

3. A detailed review will be undertaken of the demands during the next 25 years for rural land, and particularly foodlands, by all governments, municipal, provincial and federal. This will include a detailed review of all transportation and highway corridors, including road widening and other public infrastructure. It is recognized that highways need not be designed for 80 miles per hour when speed limits are set at 55 miles per hour. It is recognized that multiple use can be made of all corridors. We believe that the public will want to know how much of our land is being used by public agencies before we cut back on private use, and we propose to ensure that the future public use of foodland in Ontario be minimized in every possible way. For example, a reduction of 10 feet in highway rights-of-way at present land costs would make a major change in highway budgets this year and in farmland use in perpetuity.

4. Market value assessment will be introduced across the province. Our policy has been to relieve full-time farmers of the burden of real estate taxation on their food land. Market value assessment bears fully on those who are not farmers, but who own land capable of being farmed. This burden can be lifted if the land is actually put into production. It is our belief that this policy will, over a

period of years, narrow the widening urban shadow around our cities and return a substantial acreage of foodland to food production.

5. For municipalities which shift development from better lands to less favoured soils, within an urban boundary, special programs will be considered to compensate for higher servicing costs.

6. The industrial park program will provide assistance to municipalities in Eastern and Northern Ontario to assemble and service industrial land so that new industrial growth can locate out of Central Ontario, on lands of low agricultural value. The provincial site at Edwardsburg also provides a location for the expansion of heavy industry where it will enhance the local economic base without damaging the prospects for ongoing agriculture.

7. Recreational use of lower class lands will be encouraged. Campgrounds on private lands provide a much needed solution to rounding out the facilities available in public lands. Lands poorer in agricultural capability but rich in scenic potential in Eastern and Northern Ontario, and in the counties on the fringes of the Shield are available for recreation uses. As long as environmental and health safeguards are maintained, the desire for outdoor recreation should be met on lands less suited to food production. The policy for preferred use may well transfer some lands now in agriculture to recreational use while at the same time reducing pressures for recreational use on lands of predominantly agricultural value.

8. The Agricultural Code of Practice is being revised to provide a framework for the establishment and expansion of livestock enterprises and to ensure adequate protection from encroachment upon these enterprises by other types of

land use. The Code contains guidelines for the management of livestock operations and for the siting of new residences adjacent to livestock operations to minimize complaints of odour and noise. The Agricultural Code of Practice has proved itself an important tool in land use planning. The revised Code refines the Minimum Distance Separation formula to reduce the potential for future environmental conflicts between non-compatible uses.

Other amendments will be made to ensure that farmers have the freedom to develop viable farm enterprises. The government is studying policies on the movement of agricultural machinery so that farmers can move their machinery freely between farms provided designated safety measures are observed. It is working on the problem of control of bird and animal pests in agricultural areas. Measures relating to housing for farm help and seasonal labour are also under review. The government is looking at the broad area of farm operations such as drainage, spraying, and fertilizing with a view to liberalizing regulations on individual activities provided environmental considerations and designated safety measures are observed.

9. The Food Land Development Branch will develop guidelines to assist municipalities in planning for ongoing agriculture. These guidelines will include recommendations for large blocks of farmland to ensure economic viability and community identification and the use of buffers to prevent conflicts between agricultural and urban land uses. They will also suggest that small scale development takes place as a logical extension of existing development, grouped rather than scattered, and designed as an asset to our rural countryside. The guidelines will require that population projections in new plans be realistic and compatible with provincial growth objectives for the general area, and that the amount of land

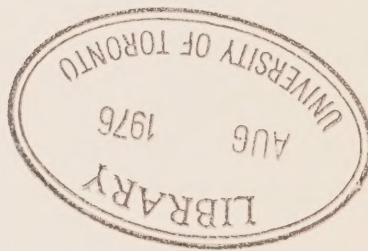
allocated for various uses is realistically tied to population and growth projections. Where urban growth trends indicate the continued absorption of prime food lands, alternatives of increased urban densities or the redirection of some of that growth to communities on lands of lower agricultural capability will be encouraged.

10. This government will continue, in co-operation with both the University of Guelph and the Government of Canada, to accelerate the updating of soils classifications in Ontario, so that the most accurate soil quality information is available for local planning purposes.

While we can look ahead and hypothesize about what future conditions will be and what future markets will demand, we must be realistic about agriculture in the present. Our agricultural production is in balance with what we can currently utilize. Ontario producers can grow more. Ontario consumers will be encouraged to make use of a higher proportion of Ontario grown food, but changes in the food supply system have to be made with care and forethought. Food is a unique commodity in its market behaviour. Because it is produced world-wide by many millions of individual businessmen, each making their own decisions to produce, a small deficit in production tends to escalate food prices rapidly while a small surplus results in sharply depressed returns to farmers. Miscalculations resulting in oversupply can bring hardship to farmers and will ultimately reduce our future capacity for food production. For these reasons we have taken care to effect a balance of policy initiatives, to ensure that both Ontario farmers and consumers will benefit from the

measures which are needed to preserve our farmers, our foodlands and the capital base of Ontario agriculture.

This food policy is consistent with our general approach to all policy: to make the best use of local resources, to build and develop on the basis of comparative advantage, and to leave decision-making in the hands of the municipalities wherever possible. This policy will be combined with our present long-term planning and credit services to agriculture; and with our production assistance through the offices of the agricultural representatives. These offices with their staffs of agrologists, engineers and home economists, have made a major contribution to the productivity increases made by Ontario farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food will assume a high priority and profile in the future, on behalf of every Ontario farmer and consumer.





3 1761 1146918 1

